



TECHNICAL BRIEF

Summer 2006

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The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Main Street Program provides downtown revitalization technical assistance to Virginia communities, using the National Main Street Center's Four Point Approach™ (Organization, Promotion, Design & Economic Restructuring) to comprehensive preservation-based revitalization of historic commercial districts.



Department of Housing and
Community Development

Virginia Main Street

MONITOR

Lynchburg Named Great American Main Street

By Stephen Versen

The City of Lynchburg and Lynch's Landing, Inc. have received the 2006 Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA). The award, the most prestigious bestowed by the National Trust Main Street Center, was presented June 5 at their national conference in New Orleans.

When presenting the award to Lynchburg, Doug Loescher, director of the National Trust Main Street Center, noted several key strengths and accomplishments, specifically the city's commitment to the Downtown and Riverfront Masterplan as shown through its annual contribution of \$1 million in capital funds to help implement it. Also pointed



Lynchburg's contingent receiving GAMSA at the National Main Streets Conference.

Lynchburg is one of four communities to receive this year's award, which recognizes exceptional accomplishments in revitalizing America's historic and traditional downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts.

"The hallmark of a truly great community is its resilience," said Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "Lynchburg has overcome many obstacles in its quest to reclaim its historic buildings and recruit new businesses – and because of these efforts, the community is thriving."

out was the broad community support for downtown revitalization as evidenced by the 1,500 volunteers who turn out annually for Lynch's Landing activities and who have donated more than 45,000 service hours since 2001.

Lastly, he mentioned downtown Lynchburg's success in preserving its architecture and bringing vitality downtown through the rehabilitation of more than 57 historic commercial buildings, including the \$6.8 million transformation of an abandoned industrial building into Amazement Square, a multi-disciplinary children's museum that brings more than 90,000 visitors downtown annually.

(continued on page 2)

Building Economic Vitality Downtown

Governor Tim Kaine also congratulated Lynch's Landing, Inc. and the City of Lynchburg on GAMSAs, saying "The community has shown an incredible commitment to restoring its downtown area, and truly deserves this national honor." He also noted previous Virginia GAMSAs



Downtown Lynchburg and the James River

winner Staunton and Manassas by saying, "The fact that we have had three winners is a point of pride for Virginia, and a testament to the success of our Virginia

Main Street program and our designated Main Street communities."

In accepting the award, Terri Proffitt, downtown executive director of Lynch's Landing commented, "Winning this award isn't like crossing a finish line, it's more like an inspirational shot in the arm to challenge our community to set a new standard for an exciting and sustainable downtown."

Ron Jefferson, board president of Lynch's Landing also commented, "We believe that our success in Lynchburg is a direct result of the great partnerships Lynch's Landing has with city government, and with the 107 local organizations and corporations who have partnered with us to support downtown revitalization."

Thinking of Applying for a Great American Main Street Award?

By Terri Proffitt

Virginia now has three Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA) winners. The cities of Staunton and Manassas brought home the award in 2000 and 2003 respectively, and now Lynchburg has received this great honor. When considering applying, the most important thing to remember is that downtown revitalization is never "done." Don't wait until you think everything is perfect to apply - it never will be! There is always more work to do, one more project under construction, one more business you are trying to recruit, etc.

Our advice to other communities is that even if you don't think you'll win, you should review the application to learn the ways National Main Street measures success. Check to find out if you are tracking information the right way. Your application process will be much easier in the future if you have started recording the correct information as the years go by.

The application is heavy on statistics - at a more detailed level than is submitted to Virginia Main Street. Questions require information on businesses, housing, vacancy rates by building and floor, and federal investment by project and by year since the beginning of your program - tough to do if you haven't been keeping good records. Be sure to document the history of revitalization in your community, know what triggered revitalization efforts and what groups have been involved. Also, don't forget to build your photo collection. Be sure to have a collection with great shots that include "before and afters," people enjoying your downtown, interesting architecture, and quality building renovations.

A time consuming part of the application is getting letters of support from other people and groups in the community. While you can't collect your letters over the years, as GAMSAs only allows

current letters of support, you may realize you have some work to do on your partnership building as you think about finding 20 people to write you letters of support.

Finally, think about what your major accomplishments are. This is your story of the great things you have done. Even if you aren't applying for GAMSAs anytime soon, defining your major accomplishments makes for easily used talking points when building interest in your program. The GAMSA application process is actually quite lengthy - plan for about 70 hours of work in preparing it. Breaking the application into manageable pieces and getting help from staff and board members spreads the workload. The credibility and visibility to your program and downtown is a once-in-a-lifetime accomplishment. Pull up the GAMSA application and take a look. You might not be "done" with your revitalization, but you might find out GAMSAs are "ready" for you!



Terri Proffitt has been Downtown Executive Director for Lynch's Landing since 2000.

In addition to her work for Lynch's Landing, she serves on numerous boards, including the Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Virginia Downtown Development Association.

VMS Note:

Although the National Main Street Center is not taking GAMSAs applications for 2007, the suggestions given here are relevant for many other awards, as well as for potential, future GAMSAs.

Surviving Executive Director Transition

Avoiding Disaster and Dealing with it When it Happens Anyway

By Deborah Turcott, New Hampshire Main Street Center, with input from Jef Buehler, Main Street New Jersey

You show up for a board meeting with your cup of coffee and a pastry ready to engage in another month's updates on Main Street in your community. You notice that the agenda has been rearranged and the executive director has the first slot. Within moments of approving last month's minutes, you are hit by it.

The resignation tornado overtakes you and the other 11 board members. Panic sets in. In three weeks she will be gone. Who will run next month's event? Who will get the mail? Who will make sure the bills are paid? And who will make sure that everything happens exactly as it should, when it should, and be incredibly successful in the process?

Have you been there? Have you been hit by the resignation tornado that seems to turn your board upside down in a matter of moments? If you have, then you know and understand the sentiments and concern that set in immediately upon your executive director's resignation. If you have been fortunate enough to not have been hit yet, please don't fool yourself into thinking you're safe forever.

Transition happens. In fact, it happens to the best of communities, in the best of programs and even to the best of boards. Transition, however, does not have to be a tornado for your organization if you follow these 10 steps for disaster response.

Transition Survival Kit: Avoiding Disaster Amidst the Storm

1. **Save the Bridge!:** Your current executive director is still an asset to the organization so do not burn the bridge by begrudging the fact that he or she is leaving. Many organizations make the mistake of writing off their current manager and immediately looking to the administrative assistant to fill the role on an interim basis. Yes, your administrative assistant will play a role, but don't ask them to do a job that an economic development professional should be doing.

Utilize your current executive director by requesting an exit interview with them to discuss not only the pertinent reasons for leaving, but also suggestions on improvements for the organization. Ask them to create a transition binder to house all of the important information a new executive director would need when coming on board, and request that they train the new director or the interim director if timing allows.

2. **Create an Immediate Transition Response Team (ITRT):** Bring the full board into the fold of information immediately if the announcement is not made at a board meeting. It is then up to the board to create a team that can handle the transition which allows for flexibility with the search process.

Moving straight to the search process without adequately handling the transition can be extremely detrimental for your organization. If your transition team works well, you will have plenty of time to find the RIGHT candidate to be your next fearless leader. Utilize the ITRT to be liaisons for major projects, review all personnel policies before hiring again, handle public relations for the transition and the search, serve as liaisons to committees, and review the current workplan to determine if projects will need realignment or a change of schedule during the transition. The ITRT can be entirely made up of board members or of board members and volunteers.

3. **Avoid Media Frenzy:** Controlling the flow of information about the resignation, transition, and search is crucial to maintain a positive public image for the organization. The board or ITRT should designate a main contact for the media who can handle inquiries about the transition. Press releases need to be positive and explain an action plan for the transitional time and the search process. In all media contacts, focus on the accomplishment of the organization, not the void of the executive director. If at all possible, increase your public presence during the transition time to ensure the community and current volunteer base that you are still moving forward showing existing and potential partners, as well as prospective candidates, in your area how stable, positive and professional your organization is.
4. **Patience Not Patients:** Rushing into action without a plan, hiring too quickly, allowing the panic to overwhelm you can create a high casualty count. Be patient about the transition and save yourself from being a patient of the transition!
5. **The Search (and Rescue) Team:** Many board members in Main Street communities may not have experience in the hiring process, so don't ask them to play a role on a search committee. There are many community leaders, stakeholders, and municipal representatives that have experience

hiring and managing staff. Call on their expertise in the process and reap the additional benefit of their buy in for whoever is hired. Keep board participation between 25 and 50 percent of the search committee and take advantage of the perspective, expertise, and experience of Virginia Main Street (VMS) staff.

6. **Triage:** What exactly do you need? The search team should come up with a list of desirable qualities and upcoming projects that may require certain areas of expertise. It is also helpful to engage the committee chairs by asking for their top ten list for a new executive director. ALWAYS be mindful of the personalities in your community, a person with great knowledge can still be a bad fit if they can't play well with others.
7. **The Search:** Based on your triage information and needs assessment review, edit the job description, write the ad from that job description, and run the ad in a variety of places. These could include local, state, and regional newspapers, professional association newsletters and list serves, and Web sites that your candidate would likely see, such as the National Main Street Center Web site.

If you don't know what sites those may be, search Google for non-profit management jobs, economic development jobs, and community development jobs for your area and see what results you get. More than likely your potential candidate may do the same thing! Don't forget that there are tools out there for your use. The National Main Street Center and VMS both have helpful tools. Think outside the box to determine other means of finding out if this person is the best fit for you, such as: the Myers Briggs personality assessment, profiling tools, criminal background checks, by creating ranking sheets for resumes and interviews, and using online tools you can find easily by Googling "Human Resource Tools for Hiring."

8. **Communication:** Throughout the process, communication will be key to your success in dealing with the storm. Create open communication lines with the candidates so there is a clear understanding of the process and to show that you are a professional organization that can truly handle the hiring process. Remind the community often of the work that continues to be accomplished by the organization during the transition and update them on where you are in the search process. Lastly, be sure to keep your committees posted as they are continuing to follow the Four Point Approach™ and the workplan. Feeling left out of the loop can invalidate their time and effort.

9. **Choosing Your Next Commander of Operations:** Keep the process clean by determining interview questions in advance, ranking resumes, and keeping a paper trail for each candidate. It's important that each candidate is treated consistently.

If you choose to do two interviews, use a profiling tool in between the first and second to help flush out red flags and provide you with specific interview questions to get at those red flags.

Also consider assigning a task or project (that includes a writing sample) to be presented at the second interview, or use a live, trial-by-fire interview where candidates actually walk Main Street and meet with a range of Main Street personalities.

The ability to write, speak publicly, and work with all stakeholders are critical pieces in the success puzzle of a Main Street executive director's job. Create a professional and flexible package similar to those of other economic development or non-profit management positions in your area. Consider creative approaches to the package including longevity bonuses, comp time, and downtown discount cards to reinforce your perceived interest.

Issue a press release announcing your new hire, validating the professionalism of the position, and highlighting the continued momentum of the organization during the transition. And, always host a welcome party for your new executive director. It provides them with a chance to meet many people at once, provides you with an opportunity to reinvigorate the organization's friends and volunteers, and is a draw for the general public to learn more about your organization.

10. **Evaluation and Training:** Once the hiring process is complete, the work is not over! Your new executive director should meet with project and committee liaisons, get an official tour of the community, have an orientation with VMS staff, get in-office training from someone on the transition team, and receive a 90-day review. Also be sure to ask your new executive director their thoughts about the hiring process. You may gather helpful insight for the next time the tornado hits.



Deborah Turcott is Program Associate for New Hampshire Main Street. In this role she is responsible for delivery of services and training to local Main Street communities.

She will be presenting on organizational essentials at the VMS Essentials training September 20 & 21 in Berryville.

Virginia Main Street's Façade Improvement Programs

By Stephen Versen and Jeremiah Christopher

The outward appearance of downtown buildings and businesses is often the most visible sign of revitalization. Even relatively simple improvements to a building's façade, such as a new coat of paint or an awning, can completely change the way passersby perceive downtown.

More extensive renovations, such as removing inappropriate siding or installing historically accurate windows, can make an even bigger visual impact. These improvements often lead to increased property values and patronage from customers, rewarding business and building owners with a bigger return on their investment.

Because of these numerous benefits, building façade improvement programs, which generally only deal with the part of the building that's visible from the street, have been central to the efforts of Main Street organizations. Façade improvement programs are particularly important in communities that are just beginning the physical revitalization of their commercial districts and have a greater number of vacant and dilapidated storefronts.

An indication of the importance of these programs to downtown is that they are often the only direct cash incentive or matching program that the tightly budgeted Main Street programs offer. A recent survey of the 20 Virginia Main Street Communities showed that 13 have

active façade improvement programs. Of the ones that don't, four are mature Main Street communities with few blighted buildings and one has funds for such work available through a non-Main Street source.

Of the 65 percent of Main Street programs that do offer façade improvement funds, the specifics vary. However, almost all require some form of matching funds from the building or business owner. This is important, not only to make the program's limited funds stretch further, but to ensure those undertaking the improvements are committed partners in revitalization. The table below gives the basics of each community's program.

In many communities, these programs have had a significant impact. Danville, for example, has seen major improvements in the appearance of their commercial district since the implementation of their façade improvement assistance program. A project in the 400 block of Main Street made a tremendous visual impact and encouraged several businesses off Main Street to consider improving their own structures.

Simply making façade improvement funds available is not enough. It is important for the program to be marketed well and designed to maximize impact and involvement of the property owner.

Virginia Main Street's Façade Improvement Programs

VMS Community	Facade Program	Match	Maximum Grant	Notes
Bedford	Yes	1:1	\$250	
Berryville	No	N/A	N/A	
Culpeper	Yes	N/A	\$500	
Danville	Yes	1:1	\$30,000	Given as five-year forgivable loan (20% forgiven each year as long as original investor maintains ownership)
Franklin	Yes	1:1	\$500	
Harrisonburg	Yes	N/A	\$25,000	While match is expected, organization solicits applications annually, reviews, and then determines which façade projects to fund
Lexington	Yes	1:1	\$500	Match up to \$250 available for sign and awning improvements
Luray	Yes	1:1	\$2,000	
Lynchburg	Yes	3:1	\$10,000	Leverages three private dollars for every one façade program dollar
Manassas	No	N/A	N/A	
Marion	Yes	1:1	\$1,000	
Martinsville	Yes	1:1	\$2,000	
Orange	Yes	1:1	\$250	
Radford	No	N/A	N/A	
Rocky Mount	No	N/A	N/A	No local program, however, façade matching grants available in some areas through CDBG funds
South Boston	No	N/A	N/A	
Staunton	No	N/A	N/A	
Warrenton	Yes	N/A	\$600	Grants offered for planters, up to \$600
Waynesboro	Yes	1:1	\$5,000	
Winchester	No	N/A	N/A	

400 Block of Main Street, Danville



Before

powerful visual impact created by façade improvements are a clear demonstration of a program's efficacy and play an important role in maintaining community support. These programs can make an even greater impact on downtown when used in conjunction with other powerful rehabilitation incentive programs such as state and Federal Historic Tax Credits, Enterprise Zone incentives, and local property tax abatements. Numerous resources are available for communities considering starting a façade improvement program, or who simply



After

Downtown Danville's Executive Director, Liz Sater, suggests that programs have "a logical application process and determine who will guide those applications through the process. Make sure that enhancements are approved by the relevant design committee before work begins, and try to keep the same person involved with projects from start to finish, to make sure nothing falls through the cracks."

While only one part of an effective downtown revitalization effort, the

just want to improve the one they already have. To learn more, contact the Virginia Main Street program.

Stephen Versen, a community development administrator in the Virginia Main Street Program, has a background in planning and economic development.

Jeremiah Christopher is program assistant with the Virginia Main Street Program and recently earned a Master of Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Commonwealth University.

*People, Places
&
Happenings*
resources & news
you can use 

2007 Round for Virginia Main Street Designation Announced

It's here! Virginia Main Street (VMS) will be accepting community applications for designation as an official Virginia Main Street community in April 2007. VMS will make applications available this December and offer application workshops in January 2007. The 2007 application round will be similar to 2004, with a competitive application process and the announcement of up to three new Main Street communities in late summer. Communities interested in applying should contact the VMS office to discuss eligibility requirements and other steps they can take to prepare.

Terrific Web Resource for Nonprofits

The Web site Idealist.org, a publication of the nonprofit Action Without Borders, offers a frequently asked questions and answers for nonprofits on its site. Drawn from online communications about nonprofits, mostly in the United States of America, beginning in the early 1990s, the site organized numerous topics under five categories (organization, management, regulation, resources, and development) and addresses each in detail.

Go to www.idealists.org, select "Nonprofit Managers" under "Resources," and then "Nonprofit FAQ."

Four Communities Join DHCD Commercial District Affiliate Program

Virginia Main Street is proud to welcome four new communities from across the state to the DHCD

Commercial District Affiliate program. The Towns of **Saltville** (Pop. 2,204) and **Richlands** (Pop. 4,144) both in southwestern Virginia, the Town of **Remington** (Pop. 624) in the north-central Piedmont, and the Village of **Mechanicsville** (Pop. 30,464) on the outskirts of Richmond, have all successfully applied for DHCD Commercial District Affiliate status.

Affiliate communities are eligible for quarterly Main Street trainings, remote consultation, and other Virginia Main Street services.

To find out how your community can become an Affiliate, check out our Web site at www.dhcd.virginia.gov/MainStreet

Virginia Makes Significant Contribution to National Main Street Conference

Virginians from around the state were the presenters in three well-attended educational sessions at the recent National Main Street Conference held June 5 - 8, 2006 in New Orleans. The number of sessions and variety of topics indicates the strong and innovative nature of downtown revitalization in Virginia.

The "Asset-based Economic Development Strategies for Downtowns" session focused on promoting downtown's structural assets with the cultural and natural assets of the surrounding region.

Amy Yarcich of the Virginia Main Street Program discussed developing an online travel itinerary in partnership with the National Park Service.

To view the travel itinerary, visit: www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/VAmainstreet.

Todd Christensen of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, and **Woody Crenshaw** of DHCD Commercial District Affiliate **Floyd**, then discussed the development of the Crooked Road and 'Round the Mountain. These innovative initiatives capitalize on the rich and unique music, culture, arts and crafts of Southwest Virginia to increase tourism and develop the local economy.

More information can be found at: www.thecrookedroad.org and www.roundthemountain.org.

Kimberly Vann, a crime prevention specialist with the Henrico County Division of Police, taught a session on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) called "Safer by Design." In short, CPTED advocates for the proper design and effective use of the physical environment as a way to reduce the incidence and fear of crime in a particular area. It also offers many techniques for existing commercial districts that improve safety and can make public spaces more inviting.

To learn more go to www.co.henrico.va.us/police/cpted.htm or www.vcpa.org/CPTED.htm.

Wayfinding, using signage to create a sense a place and improve visitor experience, is a hot topic in downtown revitalization. The Town of **Leesburg**, a DHCD Commercial District Affiliate, represented in the session by Economic Development Director **Betsy Fields** and Tourism Coordinator **Marantha Edwards**, is investing heavily in wayfinding and presented their experiences and successes. **Sandy Hanger**, a wayfinding expert with the respected **Staunton** architecture and planning firm **Frazier Associates**, gave an overview of the topic and discussed planning for the Leesburg project.

To learn more about wayfinding, contact **Sandy Hanger** with **Frazier Associates** at (540) 886-6230 or shanger@frazierassociates.com.

New Board and Staff for VDDA

The Virginia Downtown Development Association (VDDA) recently announced its board of directors for 2006-2007 at their annual meeting held in **Leesburg**, Virginia. **L. Elizabeth McCoury**, assistant to the city manager for Downtown and Village Development in the City of **Suffolk**, is the new president. VDDA also announced the hiring of **Jodi Gillette** from the City of **Lynchburg** to serve in the position of administrator.

In addition to her involvement with VDDA, **Jodi** serves on the board of **Lynch's Landing** and is involved in a number of downtown projects.

Also new to the organization are Dr. **John Accordino** and **Chris Chittum**. Accordino is associate professor of Urban Studies and Planning in the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University. Chittum is responsible for overseeing the operation of the Planning Division for Roanoke's Department of Planning Building and Economic Development.

People

Jeremiah Christopher, who has served ably as program assistant to Virginia Main Street over the past year, is taking a full-time position as a Planner I with New Kent County. VMS and DHCD thank him for his service and wish him well as he enters the "real world."

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DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT CALENDAR

August '06

- 9-23 Entrepreneur Express Workshops, multiple locations (Virginia Department of Small Business Assistance, http://www.sba.gov/va/VA_EETOURS.html)
- 18 Virginia Downtown Development Association Hot Topics: Charlottesville (jkgillette@aol.com, 434-665-8794)
- 21-23 Business Ventures for Nonprofits Workshop: Charleston, WV (Social Enterprise Alliance, <http://www.se-alliance.org>)
- 23 Introduction to Fundraising Planning: Washington, D.C. (The Foundation Center, <http://foundationcenter.org/washington/fundplandc.html>)

September '06

- 20-21 **Virginia Main Street Essentials: Berryville (Virginia Main Street, mainstreet@dhcd.virginia.gov, (804) 371-7030**
- 24-26 21st Annual Virginia Preservation Conference: Williamsburg (APVA Preservation Virginia, www.apva.org)
- 29-10/1 Merchants Association 101st Annual Membership Meeting: Wintergreen Resort (Virginia Retail Merchants Association, <http://www.virginiaretail.org/events.php>)

October '06

- 15-17 Virginia Municipal League Annual Conference: Virginia Beach (<http://www.vml.org/CAL/Cal.html>)
- 25-27 Virginia Downtown Development Association Conference: Suffolk (Jodi Gillette, jkgillette@aol.com, (434) 665-8794)

November '06

- 9-10 **Virginia Main Street Manager's Retreat: Sweet Briar**
- 29-12/1 Governor's Housing Conference: Norfolk (Department of Housing and Community Development, www.dhcd.virginia.gov/ADMIN/GHC.htm)